

# “The Greenest City in the World”

## Physical & Natural Environment: Position Statement



milton keynes council



This document has been produced by Milton Keynes council to outline the physical and natural environment core policy vision for how Milton Keynes can aspire to become the 'Greenest City in the World'. This document has been produced with the support of The Parks Trust, the council's key partner in managing the city's landscape.

The Government's *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan (2018)*, sets out a comprehensive and long-term approach to protecting and enhancing the diversity of landscapes and habitats. Our Sustainability Strategy (2019 – 2050) sets out a vision for Milton Keynes as the first major world city to commit to becoming carbon negative by 2050 and being a world-leading sustainable city.

Milton Keynes has always led by example. The strategic open space network was established from the outset as an integral element of the design of the city. This network of natural and green spaces is core to the heritage and identity of the new city. The linear parks, woodlands, grid road corridors and balancing lakes provide more than attractive amenity spaces; they provide connectivity for people, wildlife and water.

Enhancing existing sites such as The Blue Lagoon, Emberton Country Park and linear parks will see great gains in their value to nature and our citizens. Opportunities will be sought for new sites on this scale as the city continues to grow as linked to Plan:MK. New high protection sites will be designated and wildlife corridors will be extended outwards.

In becoming the "Greenest City in the World" this document outlines Milton Keynes as an ambitious and innovative city, taking the action necessary to address the environmental issues the world faces in biodiversity loss and climate change. As the city of the future Milton Keynes must take the lead and set a precedent for our peers.

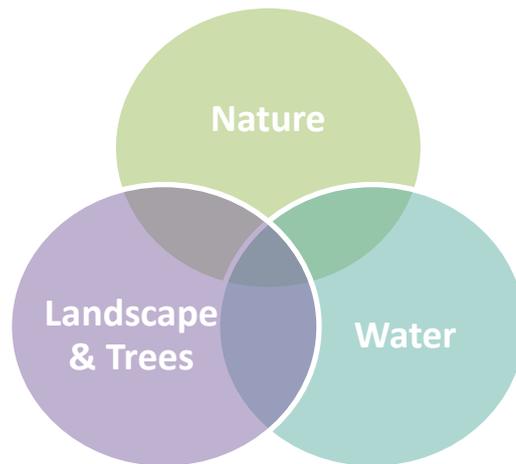


***Green space and water in Milton Keynes***

# Introduction

Milton Keynes must take a holistic view on the environment to provide a wide ranging and far reaching vision to deliver its greenest city ambitions. To do this the diagram below demonstrates Milton Keynes' approach to the physical and natural environment through the three integrated pillars of nature, water and landscape and trees.

**Physical & Natural Environment 'Three Pillars'**



These three pillars are supported by a set of principles specific to each and underpinned four core objectives to guide delivery:

## ***Conserve***

Conserve and protect existing sites of biodiversity, wildlife areas and the principles of multi-functional green spaces, linear parks, wildlife corridors and designated sites.

## ***Restore***

Restore and manage species and habitats appropriate to Milton Keynes and its wider regional physical and geographical context in a way that mitigates against and adapts to a changing climate.

## ***Create***

Create new green infrastructure and biodiversity assets that are interconnected and integrate with the way ecosystems work, and enhance the capacity of our natural environment to provide ecosystem services.

## ***Engage***

Engage people with natural environments rich in wildlife, enabling and promoting access to allow them to enjoy and experience the natural environment and the benefits to public health, regardless of age, race, ability or gender.

# Nature in the City

## *Vision*

***Milton Keynes will continue to be a place that understands and appreciates the value of nature. Nature will be everywhere for people to enjoy and improve their sense of wellbeing. We will provide space for nature, enhance the natural value of the city and adapt to climate change.***

## *Principles*

The environment and landscape will continue to be a key feature of the city.

- The city will be friendly and accommodating to wildlife and be a vibrant and living landscape
- We will work collaboratively with The Parks Trust, Parish & Town Councils, other partners and the community to develop a city scale approach to biodiversity
- Ensure that nature is placed at the heart of landscape management decision making
- Enable and promote the positive impact of nature particularly for those who stand to benefit most from the substantial mental and physical health benefits.
- Provide space for leisure, recreation, active travel and other opportunities for physical engagement with the natural environment.

## *Conserve*

Milton Keynes has been designed and built on green principles, these must continue to be reinforced as the city develops and grows. Existing parks and open spaces, and their founding principles, must be conserved as a priority and existing sites of high biodiversity value continue to be managed in a way to maintain and protect them.

## *Restore*

We will calculate the current biodiversity value of the city. This base line will identify priority areas for restoration and investment in the existing environment. This will also inform future management practices to ensure habitats improve and their ecological value increases. Sites in poorer condition will be managed to enhance their condition.

## *Create*

With partners we will continue to create diverse habitats across our city, ensuring new woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and water courses are of high quality for wildlife. Opportunities to extend and connect areas of biodiversity will be sought. Linear parks must continue to be integrated into expansion areas resulting in greater biodiversity gain and extension of wildlife corridors. Additional land will be brought into management for the purpose of increasing the resilience of our ecosystems.

## *Engage*

We will work to enable all members of the community to have equal opportunities to access nature. We will seek to people in the city's natural environment, many for the first time. Through this approach we will aim to transfer new skills and knowledge and strengthen emotional connections with the natural world, helping to enable Milton Keynes to become a **National Park City** in the future.

# Water in the City

## **Vision**

***Milton Keynes will be a place that understands, respects and enjoys water in the environment. Our communities will be resilient and adapt to changes in national and local water conditions. The Greenest City in the World will be one that understands the role of water in the city, the function it serves, how it is best managed and how to interact with it to the greatest benefit.***

## **Principles**

Milton Keynes has an abundance of water features including lakes, rivers, ponds, floodplains and wet woodland which provides opportunities to connect communities with their environment providing physical and mental health benefits. Water will be managed holistically as a resource in conjunction with the wider natural environment.

- The city will be designed to make it resilient to potential pressures of flood and drought as a result of climate change
- We will preserve and enhance our natural water resources for future generations
- We will advocate public interaction with water in a safe, informed and respectful way
- The quality of our water resources will be managed carefully to ensure they are physically, chemically and biologically healthy and can support diverse wildlife.
- The city will work to manage its surface water environment to ensure downstream catchment flood resilience

## **Conserve**

Milton Keynes has a long heritage in developing multi-functional blue infrastructure and integrated storm water control dating back to the inception of the city in the 1960's. We will ensure that the resilience standards provided by these are enhanced through new developments within the Borough of Milton Keynes and the River Great Ouse Catchment. Our significant pond network must be preserved and conserved to ensure the health of aquatic habitats, as well as playing their role in water and flood management systems.

## **Restore**

We will understand the current condition of our water courses and water bodies and identify opportunities to restore degraded water landscapes to improve their functional capacity and support greater biodiversity.

## **Create**

In order to address surface water flooding, urban growth and regeneration will adopt a comprehensive approach to designing sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) with surface water being attenuated and treated on site using methods that blend infrastructure nature, landscape and trees. Milton Keynes will create a more diverse portfolio of water landscapes that support greater biodiversity.

## **Engage**

The water environment is something to be enjoyed in both urban and rural areas. We will enable communities to enjoy and better understand the city's balancing lakes, watercourses and the wider network of blue infrastructure. Sustainable drainage systems will be seen a positive tool for providing local amenity benefit as well as managing flood risk.

# Trees in the City

## **Vision**

***Trees are integral to the landscape and environmental quality of Milton Keynes on par with all other natural utility and infrastructure. The urban forest must inspire collaboration and creativity to ensure it thrives and expands as the city's green shield and the icon at the heart of The Greenest City in the World.***

## **Principles**

- We will understand the value of our trees and consider them a collective resource, managed to maximise their potential in maintaining the environmental quality of Milton Keynes
- The urban forest comprises all the trees in the urban realm – in both public and private spaces. We will seek to unite land owners in a uniform approach to holistic tree management, reflecting their crucial role in the wider urban ecosystem
- The combined elements: trees in parks, streets, private gardens, public land, highways and urban woodlands are the urban forest; and should be viewed and managed as one.
- We will maintain the original vision of Milton Keynes by ensuring necessary tree removals are mitigated, maintaining the overall tree stock
- We will ensure a diverse population of tree species is maintained, resilient to climate change and biosecurity challenges
- Milton Keynes will take a lead in engaging Forest City principles for urban living

## **Conserve**

We will protect veteran, ancient, historical or trees of particular cultural importance through Tree Protection Orders. We will recognise and respond to pests and disease and identify specific trees requiring action. We will profile our tree stock through an integrated database and monitoring and recording processes. We will establish a detailed base line of tree stock, condition and ownership within the urban forest, so as to ensure sustainability.

## **Restore**

Our locally developed guidance ***Right Tree Right Place*** will herald planting methods, appropriate aftercare, maintenance and species choice to ensure minimum intervention and maximum benefit. Employing the principles of ensuring that the right trees are being planted in the right places will minimise bio-security risk, ensure greater resilience and improve the ability of our tree stock to adapt in the future.

## **Create**

We will work with partners to identify and map canopy cover, areas of low cover and opportunities to increase tree stock and canopy cover with an increasingly diverse species and age range. We will look for opportunities to create and connect areas of woodland.

## **Engage**

Milton Keynes Council and partners will seek to inform, engage, educate and consult the community on the urban forest. Communities will be encouraged and empowered to take an active role in managing the urban forest through the collection of data, planting, maintaining trees and community events. We will look to trees as a way to help improve public health.

## Next Steps

This vision paper has been produced by Milton Keynes council, with the support of The Parks Trust, its key partner in managing the city's landscape, for launch in October 2019.

We propose to work with our other key stakeholders to deliver the principles and objectives set out in the vision in the form of an action plan to be ready by March 2020. The engagement and support of our key partners and local organisations is pivotal in producing a plan that will guide and support local planning and service delivery.

The council's teams working on Nature, Water and Landscape and Trees will invite local organisations relevant to the subject area for a series of stakeholder workshops that will identify how the vision can be delivered "on the ground".

These workshops will identify areas of collaborative working, expert advice and delivery opportunities. The Parks Trust as a supporter of the vision shall play a key role, together with Parish and Town Councils, as will specialist organisations such as The Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and Canal & River Trust.

The feedback gained from this exercise will be used to draft a delivery action plan, detailing how we will work to become the greenest city in the world. This more detailed document will be submitted to cabinet for comment and approval in the spring of 2020.

	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20
Greenest City Vision Paper submitted to Cabinet						
"Nature" - Stakeholder Engagement Sessions						
"Water" - Stakeholder Engagement Sessions						
"Trees" - Stakeholder Engagement Sessions						
Draft Greenest City Delivery Action Plan						
Submit Delivery Action Plan to Cabinet						

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